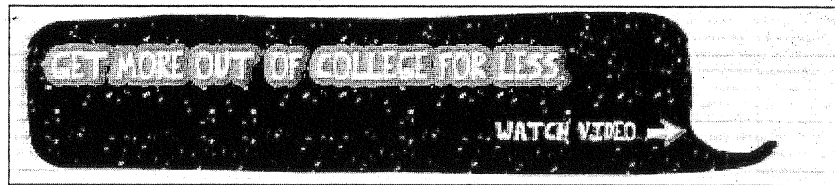


Los Angeles Times

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From the Los Angeles Times

Study offers 5 options to reshape Long Beach's breakwater

City leaders hope to persuade the Army Corps of Engineers to reconfigure the World War II-era structure. The result, they hope, will be cleaner water, bigger waves and more tourists.

By Louis Sahagun

July 24, 2009

Just off downtown Long Beach, where freighters queue up to unload much of the nation's imported goods, a long wall of rock rises from the waves, encrusted with mussels and crawling with crabs.

This is the Long Beach breakwater, a 2.2-mile vestige of World War II designed to shield the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet from stormy seas and enemy torpedoes.

Today, nearly two decades after the Navy and its ships pulled out of the area, critics contend that the stony barricade is the reason the city's now surf-less beaches are among the least popular and most polluted in the region.

Long Beach officials Thursday released the results of a study designed to attract congressional support for a controversial proposal to reconfigure the breakwater to create bigger waves, cleaner water and beaches, and more surf tourism.

The city could gain \$52 million a year in local spending -- and \$7 million annually in taxes and fees, the study found.

Details of the \$100,000 study, conducted by the engineering firm Moffat & Nichol, will be presented to the Long Beach City Council on Monday.

Many civic leaders hope the findings will spur the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which owns and operates the breakwater, to analyze the feasibility of dismantling part of the barrier.

Officials said the project will be carried out only if it can overcome daunting challenges. Major concerns include how altering the breakwater would affect navigation into the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, and the offshore loading of weaponry onto Navy ships.

Then there are the area's oil islands, one of which was destroyed by heaving seas during a storm in 1983.

"Resolving those issues," said Russell Boudreau, principal coastal engineer for Moffat & Nichol, "will be far more challenging than moving breakwater rocks around."

Supporters of the proposal said the change would revive the city's historic seaside allure.

U.S. Rep. Laura Richardson (D-Long Beach) said it was her "hope and goal" to see the project completed within a decade.

"All the pieces are coming together," she said. "We are excited about the prospect of returning waves to Long Beach, but also committed to ensuring that any such project protects homes and the economic vitality of the largest port complex in the United States.

"If it is determined that we can do those two things and return the waves," she said, "then let the waters roll. We're ready."

Ed Hendricks, 84, vice chairman of Long Beach Surfrider, an environmental group, agreed.

"But in the meantime, we have a big dead sea out there behind the breakwater that's so dirty I wouldn't stick a toe in it," he said.

Legend has it that surfing began in California in 1911 when two men returned from Hawaii with surfboards and began riding the waves in Long Beach. The city hosted the first National Surfing and Paddleboard Championships in 1938. Three years later work began on the breakwater.

After it was completed in 1949, the waves vanished and the crowds moved on to cleaner waters in Huntington Beach and Seal Beach.

Now, some owners of the older homes that hug the strand in the communities of Naples, Bluff Park and Belmont Shore worry that its removal would invite flooding and rogue waves.

"The people who want to take it down have noble goals: restoration of waves clean enough to swim in and the kind of frolicking and big seaside hotels that existed here in the 1930s," said Laurie Manny, a real estate agent in Long Beach. "On the other side are homeowners who imagine 20-foot waves barreling in during an El Niño year and nothing out there to stop them."

Complete removal of the breakwater is not recommended in the study. Instead, it offers five options, including three that would reconfigure the breakwater. They range in cost from about \$10 million to \$310 million.

Michael Schaat, director of the Cabrillo Beach Aquarium, expressed concerns about the potential effect on life forms from starfish to lobsters that reside on the ledges and between the cracks of the rocks.

"It's a biologically rich area," he said, "above and beneath the surface."

On Thursday morning, harbor seals rolled in tidal water. American black oystercatchers probed rocky crevices with their red-orange bills. Crabs scuttled into hiding. From a vessel bobbing in the shadows of 400-foot-tall terminal cranes, fishermen were catching barracuda and calico bass.

Tom Modica, the city's project manager for the breakwater study, acknowledged that it would be difficult to balance the concerns of stakeholders.

"There is a long process ahead of us before any construction could begin," he said. "But this study

starts the debate."

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